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MANAGEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
U. S. Department of Agriculture
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A summary of significant events of
interest to USDA management

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Issue #32
March 19, 1976

OFFICE OF OPERATIONS MET WITH AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES ON FEBRUARY 5, 1976,
TO DISCUSS CHANGES IN THE CONTROLLED CORRESPONDENCE SYSTEM.....Results of
that meeting were:

- ... Agency Representatives agreed that extending deadlines on correspondence which clearly and justifiably could not be answered on time would help. Implemented in memo from the Assistant Secretary for Administration to Agency Heads dated March 15, 1976.
- ... Monthly statistics will be issued earlier in the month starting with April 1976. Agencies will review instructions by March 26, 1976.
- ... Agency Representatives agreed that increased emphasis on acknowledgments should come through the line organization and that, generally, authority to sign letters of acknowledgment could be further delegated.
- ... Actions deferred:
 - ... Requirement for agencies to submit copies of replies with weekly computer printouts.
 - ... Establishment of a central unit for answering mail.
 - ... Formal system for reporting agency Congressional mail to Office of Congressional and Public Affairs. (Contact: J. Pepper, 00, ext. 78393)

WASHINGTON SPACE CONSOLIDATION PROGRESSES.....Initial moves as follows:

- ... ASCS move from Auditors Building and consolidation in South Building March 31
- ... FNS to backfill ASCS space in Auditors Building by May 15.
- ... Sales Manager and FNS to consolidate, using former ASCS space in South Building.
- ... OP Central Referral Unit to First Floor, Administration Building by April 30.
- ... Layouts for consolidation of Office of Communication labs in South Building now in process.
- ... GSA is drafting specifications for space management consultant contract. Invitation for bids expected to be issued by March 31.

(Contact: George Knapp, 00, ext. 73937)

OF THE MORE THAN 32,500 CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE REVIEWS REPORTED BY AGENCIES IN FY 1975, ONLY 95 PROGRAM RECIPIENTS WERE FOUND IN NON-COMPLIANCE.....OEO's Compliance and Enforcement Division (C&E) has initiated a program to improve effectiveness and efficiency. C&E is meeting with agencies to question review methods, to probe the basis of reporting and to discuss improvements. This year C&E objectives include monitoring agency reviews, evaluating reports, strengthening review guides and designing training for reviewers. The new guides and proposed improvements in random sampling techniques are expected to result in better coverage and identification of C.R. problems and the potential for agency managers to project trends and patterns to all recipients of program benefits. This will also assure greater benefit for dollars expended and/or reduced costs. (Contact: Dick Peer, OEO, ext. 77327)

FY 1977 BUDGET HEARINGS PROGRESSING WELL.....

- ... In the House, ERS, SRS, APHIS, ES, ARS, PSA, AMS, FNS, FCS, FAS, FCA, ASCS and FCIC had appeared as of March 12.
- ... Most questions deal with programs for which USDA is requesting a decrease or termination of funding. Specifically - FmHA grant programs (particularly water and sewer grants), Dairy Herd Improvement Program, ACP, Water Bank, Forestry Incentives, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and Special Milk Program.
- ... Asked about USDA's proposed legislative reform of conservation cost sharing programs and block grant legislation for child nutrition.
- ... Continued to question about problems USDA has with EPA, FDA and other government regulatory programs.
- ... Asked about ARS, APHIS and FAS/SM reorganizations.
- ... Concerned about recent investigations taking place in USDA. Particularly - grain inspection and Food Stamp Program.
- ... Increases requested by USDA not subject to much serious questioning except APHIS' brucellosis and boll weevil programs.
- ... In the Senate, all agencies have appeared before the subcommittee.
- ... No major problems or controversies raised.
- ... In most instances, Agency Heads asked amount they requested from Department and Department's request to OMB.
- ... Asked questions concerning consideration of inflation in the amount included in President's budget.
- ... Showed considerable interest in Conservation, Research and Education Agencies, especially ARS. Questions centered on research activities, status of Fleming Key, Plum Island and were concerned with meat and poultry inspection.
- ... Asked about termination of funding for ACP in FY 1977, and requested specifics about funding going to annual versus long term practices in ACP and Great Plains Program over a period of years.
- ... Requested expiration dates of Water Bank, Forestry Incentives, and Dairy and Beekeeper Indemnity programs.

(Contact: Bob Sherman, OMF, ext. 76176)

SENIOR LEVEL USDA MANAGERS LOCATED IN FIELD NOT CONVERSANT ABOUT FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA) AND PRIVACY ACT PROVISIONS..... After several recent presentations with question and answer sessions, Assistant Secretary Bolduc observed that many USDA field personnel are uninformed about regulations and procedures pertaining to FOIA and Privacy Act. Agencies may wish to take corrective measures where needed to avoid legal consequences if the acts are violated.

THE SENATE APPROVED A HOUSE PASSED BILL, H.R. 8617, WHICH WOULD PERMIT CERTAIN FEDERAL EMPLOYEES TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES UNDER A PARTY LABEL DURING OFF-DUTY HOURS, INCLUDING RUNNING FOR LOCAL, STATE OR FEDERAL OFFICE..... The bill would prohibit political coercion, including campaign fund solicitations by an employee's superior. The Senate amended the bill to divorce congressional pay increases from Federal employee pay increases. (Contact: E. F. Behrens, OMF, ext. 74654)

DID YOU KNOW THAT REA.....

- ... Has loaned \$10.4 billion to finance 1,095 rural electric systems which serve 8.8 million consumers over 1.8 million miles of line in 2,600 counties of 46 states.
- ... Made commitments to guarantee loans from other lending agencies to provide generating capacity equivalent to half of that installed by borrowers in the first 38 years of the program.
- ... Has loaned \$2.6 billion to 917 rural telephone systems to serve about 3.3 million subscribers over 664,276 miles of line in 46 states.
- ... Operates the Rural Telephone Bank, a separate Federal agency which has loaned an additional \$617 million to rural telephone systems.
- ... Reported a record \$2.8 billion made available to rural electric and telephone systems from REA and supplemental lending sources during calendar year 1975.
- ... Made loans in 1975 to finance electric service for 416,139 additional consumers and to construct 39,223 miles of line.
- ... Made loans in 1975 to finance service for 205,276 additional telephone subscribers and to construct 19,763 miles of line.
- ... Reported a record 110 billion kilowatt hours of electricity sold by its borrowers during the year -- a four billion kWh increase over 1974. Increase in sales reflects population growth in rural America, greater demand for electric energy as a substitute for fuels in critical shortage.
- ... Reported an increase in subscribers receiving all one-party dial service from REA-financed systems from 41.6 percent at the end of 1970 to nearly 60 percent at the end of 1975.
- ... Reported the installation of 73 percent of telephone cable underground, and the accelerated use of electronic facilities to assure optimum economy and efficiency to subscribers.
- ... Reported that its borrowers have assisted 8,388 commercial, industrial and community projects which created 506,000 jobs for rural people since 1961. Borrowers helped to create 39,400 new jobs through community projects during the year.
- ... Conducted training sessions in fiscal year 1975 for 88 visitors from 21 foreign countries interested in developing rural electrification or telephone programs in their countries.

THE ARS ACCOUNTING SYSTEM HAS RECENTLY BEEN MOVED FROM THE NOCC TO THE WCC.....

This move has freed up 11 CPU hours per month from NOCC, which is currently running close to saturation. (Contact: H. Meetze, ADS, ext. 76275)

CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IN PERSONAL PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND CONTROL.....

Congressman Bedell, House Committee on Agriculture, believes that part of the rising costs of Government is due to lack of control over the purchase and use of personal property, especially expendable supplies. He has asked the Department for a detailed report. Agencies should insure adherence to Department and agency property control requirements. (Contact: Kim Boyer, OO, ext. 77557)

COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED BILL, H.R. 12080, "CIVIL SERVICE AMENDMENTS OF 1976".....

- ... would repeal Apportionment which currently places limit by state on the number of initial professional appointments that can be made to positions in Agency headquarters.
- ... would provide CSC with statutory authority to investigate violations of, and enforce, the laws, rules and regulations relating to the merit system. Enforcement authority extends to both competitive and excepted service. Where violations are discovered, the CSC could direct Agencies to take corrective and/or disciplinary action.
- ... would prohibit preferential treatment in taking, directing others to take, recommending processing or approving any personnel action (must be taken on the basis of merit only).
- ... would provide specific statutory criteria under which the CSC could except positions from competitive service, namely, one set of criteria relating to positions requiring significant involvement in the President's programs and one set of criteria relating to positions for which it is impractical to apply competitive examination procedures.
- ... would essentially codify Executive Order 9830 which makes each agency head statutorily responsible and accountable for personnel management, and establishes a personnel officer position in the competitive service.
- ... would prohibit consideration of personal recommendations or soliciting these recommendations in connection with personnel actions (excepted for certain limited purposes).
- ... would provide for disciplinary action in cases where these prohibition are violated.
- ... would establish final appellate authority (Board of Federal Employee Appeals) independent of CSC.

(Contact: Don Kyle, OP, ext. 73185)

AS OF MARCH 16, FmHA, FNS AND RDS HAD NOT RESPONDED TO ADS REQUEST FOR PROGRAM IMPACT STATEMENTS ON ADP CEILING ALTERNATIVES..... Agencies are reminded of importance of material for March 25 briefing at OMB. Pertinent, factual information is needed to communicate significant actions undertaken by USDA in area of improved ADP management and to describe impact of proposed ceilings on USDA program areas. (Contact: H. Meetze, ADP, ext. 76275)

HIGHLIGHTS OF MARCH 18 MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING.....

Noted 2/

- ... Next Management Council Conference may be scheduled late in first week of May. General plan is to cover Assistant Secretary for Administration and Staff Office management objectives for coming year. Certain OO functions to be described if time permits. Specific date, location and agenda to follow. Deputy Administrators for Management encouraged to attend.
- ... Agencies cautioned to await final CSC/GAO action on Comptroller General decisions of 12/5 and 2/20 concerning pay for personnel temporarily appointed to higher grade positions in excess of 120 days.